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## **PRAGUE SET TO LEAVE UN MIGRATION PACT, DESPITE EU CONCERNS**

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Prime minister Andrej Babis has said he will propose the Czech Republic follows Austria, Hungary and the US in withdrawing from the United Nations pact on migration - despite the EU Commission expressing its concerns.

Babis told lawmakers in Prague on Thursday (1 November) that he shared fears the deal is blurring lines between legal and illegal migration.

"I do not like the pact," he said, according to Reuters.

"There are issues that can be interpreted in various ways. I will be proposing to my partners in government that we act in the same way as Austria or Hungary," he added.

Babis's announcement came a day after the EU commission said it was "disappointed" that Austria decided not to sign the UN pact on migration.

"We regret the decision that the Austrian government has taken. We continue to believe that migration is a global challenge where only global solutions and global responsibility sharing will bring results," a commission spokeswoman said.

The UN pact is a non-binding document approved in July by over 190 UN member nations except US president Donald Trump's administration, which backed out last year and Hungary, which withdrew its support in July, saying the agreement encourages migration.

"While according to the UN, migration is an unstoppable and good process that should be supported, Hungary views it as a bad process that is bringing danger to Europe and Hungary", Hungary's foreign minister Peter Szijjarto said at the time.

"Accordingly, our conclusion is also different: the UN believes migration should be encouraged, but according to Hungary's position it must be stopped," he added.

Up to countries

The UN pact sets out goals to better manage migration, including protection of migrants, and ways to better integrate them into new countries. It also says that migrants should also be told about

their rights, should be assisted upon arrival and should be treated in a dignified way.

It is due to be adopted in December in Morocco.

Despite concerns among its opponents that the pact would force a country into accepting migrants, the document also states that nations have the right to determine their national migration policy, adding that it is up to countries to distinguish between regular and irregular migration.

The Czech Republic in 2015 voted with Hungary, Slovakia and Romania against an EU scheme to distribute migrants across the continent based on quotas at the peak of the influx of people into Europe.

Along with Poland, central and eastern European countries then followed a tough anti-migration stance, prompting clashes with the EU commission.

Last month, Poland's interior minister also said he would recommend to the government that Warsaw quits the UN pact, as it may encourage illegal migration.

"I will recommend to prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki to opt out from the Global Compact deal, which is due to be signed in December in Marrakech," Joachim Brudzinski was quoted as saying at the time.

Vienna's rightwing government announced on Wednesday (31 October) it would not agree to the pact, because it would lead to a "human right to migration".

Austria's government, which includes the far-right Freedom Party, said the UN deal mixes up the rights of asylum seekers and economic migrants.

Austria, which holds the EU's rotating presidency, along with Hungary, have led calls for tougher border security, and centres outside of the EU for dealing with migrants seeking asylum in Europe.

The UN has called the move by Austria and Hungary "bizarre and mistaken".

"The question of whether this is an invidious way to start promoting a 'human right to migrate' is not correct. It's not in the text; there's no sinister project to advance that," UN special representative for international migration Louise Arbour said on Wednesday.

"What I also find frankly a bit disappointing is that a lot of reasons that are advanced for disengaging are either mistaken or do not reflect what this global compact is all about," Arbour added, according to Reuters.

The UN has previously criticised Hungary for its anti-immigration legislation targeting NGOs working with migrants, calling it an "assault on human rights".